



Theatres Trust announces Theatres at Risk Register 2024

Two new additions and one removal from the list due to demolition as the sector faces tougher times

Theatres Trust, the charity that campaigns to protect the UK's theatres, has published its annual **Theatres at Risk Register**, which highlights theatres across the UK under threat of closure, redevelopment or severe decay, but which all have the potential to be revived for their local communities with the right support. Theatres Trust has added two theatre buildings to the register as their futures look at risk. These are tougher times for the theatre sector due to factors including the cost-of-living crisis and the difficult economic barriers facing the industry following the pandemic. This year's list comprises 39 buildings, which all have strong architectural merit, cultural heritage or value to the local community as performance venues.

Abbeydale Picture House in Sheffield, a Grade II listed former cine-variety theatre, has been added to the list as its building fabric has significantly deteriorated in recent years, leaving its main auditorium unusable and the programming of this community arts venue unviable. **Epstein Theatre** in Liverpool also faces an uncertain future after Liverpool City Council was unable to renew its lease of the building and subsequently the associated management agreement with the incumbent theatre operator. Operator Epstein Entertainments Ltd has likewise been unable to agree new lease terms with the building landlord forcing the theatre's closure in June 2023. This has left this unique theatre / concert hall vacant and with no plans for the future.

Dudley Hippodrome has been removed from the Theatres at Risk Register as sadly it was demolished in autumn 2023 to make way for a new university building. A purpose-built 1930s variety theatre, it was the only remaining lyric theatre in the Metropolitan

Borough of Dudley. Theatres Trust, alongside a passionate local campaign group, had fought hard to save it, so is hugely disappointed with this outcome.

Gary Kemp, Theatres Trust Ambassador, musician and actor says, *Theatres are an essential part of our cultural life and bring so much to communities everywhere. I'm proud to support Theatres Trust in its mission to ensure these wonderful buildings survive for current and future generations to enjoy.*

Liverpool City Council's Cabinet Member for Culture, Councillor Harry Doyle, said, *We welcome the move to add The Epstein to the risk register as this offers renewed hope for this extraordinary space. In their role as intermediary, the Theatres Trust can now ensure there are productive conversations between the commercial landlord and any potential operators, with the shared ambition to find a positive solution which would see this important cultural asset reopening its doors.*

Jon Morgan, Theatres Trust Director comments, *The changes to the Theatres at Risk Register represent the wider issues we are seeing across the theatre sector. Squeezes on local authority budgets means many are stepping away from or significantly reducing funding to theatres, while rising costs and scarcity of funding is making it harder to repair, maintain and update buildings. We believe that all of these buildings are worth the investment, not only as valuable social and cultural facilities but also for their potential contribution to wider placemaking and regeneration.*

Now in its 18th year, the Theatres at Risk Register calls the public's attention to these important buildings, their challenges, and the significant cultural opportunities they can bring to local communities. Since the list began in 2006, more than 80 theatres have been restored, revived or had a suitable replacement built.

While no theatres have been removed from the list for positive reasons this year, slow but steady progress is being made with many buildings on the list, particularly due to the increased support Theatres Trust is able to give them through its Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities programme of grants, training and expert advice. This programme is providing valuable support to theatres on the list as they move forward through periods of change and development. This includes grant support for engagement activities and market testing for a new vision for the Theatre Royal Margate, governance training for Spilsby Sessions House to strengthen their organisation as they embark on a major capital works project and consultancy advice for Leith Theatre as they take on a new lease for the building.

Leith Theatre's Chief Executive Lynn Morrison says, *Thanks to the financial support from Theatres Trust, we have gained access to targeted expertise and mentoring. This assistance has helped us to navigate the business, unravel our next steps and reveal answers we didn't know we needed. The significance of our inclusion on the register*

feels vital and allows us to share our narrative authentically as we move in a positive direction. The register allows us to highlight our plight and the risk of losing the venue forever unless we invest in its restoration and redevelopment, while emphasising the ongoing need for support.

The theatres appearing on the 2024 register are as follows:

Brighton Hippodrome
Theatre Royal Margate
Victoria Pavilion / Winter Gardens, Morecambe
Hulme Hippodrome
Plymouth Palace
Victoria Theatre, Salford
Groundlings Theatre, Portsea
Spilsby Session house
Streatham Hill Theatre, London
Theatr Ardudwy, Harlech
Winter Gardens Pavilion, Blackpool
Abbeydale Picture House, Sheffield – NEW
Burnley Empire
Garston Empire, Liverpool
Intimate Theatre, London
Mechanics' Institute, Swindon
Tottenham Palace Theatre, London
Leith Theatre, Edinburgh
Epstein Theatre, Liverpool – NEW
Joe Longthorne Theatre, Blackpool
Roundhouse Theatre, Dover
Co-op Music Hall, Ramsbottom
Doncaster Grand
Garrick Theatre, Southport
King's Theatre, Dundee
Amulet Theatre, Shepton Mallet
Conwy Civic Hall (Cube)
Derby Hippodrome
Borough Hall, Greenwich
Kings Theatre, Kirkcaldy
Thameside Theatre, Grays
Tameside Hippodrome, Ashton-under-Lyne
Globe Theatre, Plymouth
Imperial Theatre, Walsall
Regent Theatre, Great Yarmouth
Clair Hall, Haywards Heath

Netherton Arts Centre, Dudley
Theatre Royal, Hyde
Theatre Royal, Manchester

Assessment criteria for each theatre is available via www.theatrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk/theatres-at-risk-assessment-criteria and full case studies on each can be seen on the Theatres Trust website.

Notes to Editors

Website	www.theatrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk
Twitter	@TheatresTrust, #TheatresAtRisk
Facebook	/theatres.trust
Instagram	@theatrust
Photo credit	Epstein Theatre, 2019, Ian Grundy

Theatres Trust

Theatres Trust is the national advice and advocacy body for the UK's theatres supporting all forms of theatres, whether old or new, commercial, subsidised or community-run.

We protect theatres and champion the future of live performance by advising and supporting our nation's theatres to develop best practice in design and management following the four principles of resilience, environmental sustainability, inclusivity and placemaking.

Changes to the Theatres at Risk Register 2024

New Additions

Abbeydale Picture House, Sheffield

Built in 1920, the Grade II listed Abbeydale Picture House was originally constructed as a cinema and included a ballroom and billiards hall within the basement, and lounge and café above the entrance foyer. In 1928 the building was converted to cine-variety with the addition of a stage and dressing room spaces. The building remained in active cinema use until the mid-70s when it was used as a furniture showroom, a use that required little alteration to the venue. The furniture company ceased trading in 1991, leaving the building disused for a decade. In the early 2000s the Friends of Abbeydale Picture House restored the auditorium and built a new stage, reopening the theatre in

September 2008. Operation ceased in 2012 and the building was sold at auction. It is currently in private ownership, leased to CADS, a Sheffield based charity committed to revitalising local buildings for the arts, cultural and creative industries. It has reopened the 'Fly Tower' located behind the original cinema screen as an event space, and a separate bar in the front of the building. Sadly, the poor condition of the main roof of the building has resulted in severe deterioration of the auditorium ceiling and the space is no longer safe for public use. Subsequently the operation of the venue has become unviable and the building's future uncertain. Urgent action to repair the roof and prevent further deterioration is required.

Epstein Theatre, Liverpool

The 380-seat proscenium arch theatre closed on 30th June 2023, following the withdrawal of council subsidy. There are no known plans for its revival or long-term future. Constructed in 1913, the Epstein Theatre was originally conceived as a concert hall (the Crane Hall) for instrumental recitals for the music shop it was built above, with upper levels of the 5-storey Crane Building containing associated offices. The hall was soon converted into a theatre through expansion and construction of a flytower and stage within a neighbouring building. The building came under threat of closure in the 1960s but was bought by the Liverpool Corporation, who wishes to save it for the people of Liverpool. Following a refurbishment, the venue reopened as the Neptune Theatre and remained operating as such until closure in 2005 for works to address health and safety issues. There followed an extended period of closure, the renamed Epstein Theatre finally reopening in 2011 following a £1m refurbishment. While the council still owns the Crane Building (now Hanover House), the entire building is leased to a commercial property landlord, and there had been an arrangement in place for the council to sub-lease the theatre.

Epstein Entertainments Ltd, the last operator, was awarded the contract to operate the theatre, commencing October 2021. The management agreement saw the council covering a proportion of the rent, service charge, utilities and maintenance work for the duration of the 18-month management agreement.

In June 2023, it was announced that Liverpool City Council was unable to renew the lease for the theatre. Direct negotiations by the theatre operator with the building landlord also failed to reach a workable solution and the theatre closed at the end of the same month.

Removal from the list

Dudley Hippodrome

Dudley Hippodrome was a late-1930s purpose-built variety theatre and the last remaining lyric theatre in the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley. It had been in use as a bingo hall until 2009 and was well-maintained, retaining a theatrical feel in its auditorium. It was added to the Theatres at Risk Register in 2010 when it was purchased by the

council and first considered for redevelopment. A series of unsuccessful schemes were proposed for the site, with the vacant Hippodrome deteriorating. Theatres Trust, along with passionate local community groups, repeatedly requested that the council maintained the building and reconsidered its future as a performance venue. Unfortunately, a successful bid to the government's Towns Fund initiative saw the site earmarked for a new higher education complex. Theatres Trust strongly objected to the planning application to demolish the Hippodrome but permission was granted and an appeal to the then Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities was refused. The building was demolished in autumn 2023.

All enquiries, high res images and further information:

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